

ASK AND HAVE NO. 1682

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 1, 1882
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war,
yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because
ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”
James 4:2-3*

MAY these striking words be made profitable to us by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Man is a creature abounding in wants, and ever restless, and hence his heart is full of desires. I can hardly imagine a man existing who has not many desires of some kind or another. Man is comparable to the sea anemone with its multitude of tentacles which are always hunting in the water for food, or like certain plants which send out tendrils, seeking after the means of climbing. The poet says, “Man never is, but always to be, blest.” He steers for which he thinks to be his port, but as yet he is tossed about on the waves. One of these days he hopes to find his heart's delight, and he continues to desire with more or less expectancy.

This fact appertains both to the worst of men and the best of men. In bad men desires corrupt into lusts, they long after that which is selfish, sensual, and consequently evil. The current of their desires sets strongly in a wrong direction. These lustings, in many cases, become extremely intense, they make the man their slave, they domineer over his judgment, they stir him up to violence, he fights and wars, perhaps he literally kills, in God's sight, who counts anger murder, he does kill full often. Such is the strength of his desires that they are commonly called passions, and when these passions are fully excited, then the man himself struggles vehemently, so that the kingdom of the devil suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Meanwhile in gracious men there are desires also. To rob the saints of their desires would be to injure them greatly, for by these they rise out of their lower selves. The desires of the gracious are after the best things, things pure and peaceable, laudable and elevating. They desire God's glory, and hence their desires spring from higher motives than those which inflame the unrenewed mind. Such desires in Christian men are frequently very fervent and forcible, they ought always to be so, and those desires begotten of the Spirit of God stir the renewed nature, exciting and stimulating it, and making the man to groan and to be in anguish and in travail until he can attain that which God has taught him to long for.

The lusting of the wicked and the holy desiring of the righteous have their own ways of seeking gratification. The lusting of the wicked develops itself in contention, it kills, and desires to have, it fights and it wars, while on the other hand the desire of the righteous when rightly guided betakes itself to a far better course for achieving its purpose, for it expresses itself in prayer fervent and importunate. The godly man when full of desire asks and receives at the hands of God.

At this time I shall by God's help try to set forth from our text, first, *the poverty of lusting*—“Ye lust and have not.” Secondly, I shall sadly show *the poverty of many professing Christians* in spiritual things, especially in their church capacity, they also long for and have not. Thirdly, we shall speak in closing, upon *the wealth wherewith holy desires will be rewarded if we will but use the right means*. If we ask we shall receive.

I. First, consider THE POVERTY OF LUSTING—“Ye lust, and have not.”

Carnal lustings, however strong they may be, do not in many cases obtain that which they seek after, as says the text, “Ye desire to have, and cannot obtain.” The man longs to be happy, but he is not, he

pires to be great, but he grows lower every day, he aspires after this and after that which he thinks will content him, but he is still unsatisfied, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest. One way or another his life is disappointment, he labors as in the very fire, but the result is vanity and vexation of spirit. How can it be otherwise? If we sow the wind, must we not reap the whirlwind, and nothing else?

Or if peradventure the strong lustings of an active, talented, persevering man do give him what he seeks after, yet how soon he loses it. He has it so that he has it not. The pursuit is toilsome, but the possession is a dream. He sits down to eat, and lo! the feast is snatched away, the cup vanishes when it is at his lip. He wins to lose, he builds, and his sandy foundation slips from under his tower, and it lies in ruins. He that conquered kingdoms, died discontented on a lone rock in mid ocean, and he who revived his empire, fell never to rise again.

As Jonah's gourd withered in a night, so have empires fallen on a sudden, and their lords have died in exile. So that what men obtain by warring and fighting is an estate with a short lease, the obtaining is so temporary that it still stands true, "they lust, and have not." Or if such men have gifts and power enough to retain that which they have won, yet in another sense they have it not while they have it, for the pleasure which they looked for in it is not there. They pluck the apple, and it turns out to be one of those Dead Sea apples which crumble to ashes in the hand. The man is rich, but God takes away from him the power to enjoy his wealth.

By his lustings and his warrings the licentious man at last obtains the objective of his cravings, and after a moment's gratification, he loathes that which he so passionately lusted for. He longs for the tempting pleasure, seizes it, and crushes it by the eager grasp. See the boy hunting the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, while he pursues it ardently. At last it is within reach, and with his cap he knocks it down, but when he picks up the poor remains, he finds the painted fly spoiled by the act which won it. Thus may it be said of multitudes of the sons of men—"Ye lust, and have not."

Their poverty is set forth in a threefold manner. "Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain," "Ye have not, because ye ask not." "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."

If the lusters fail, it is not because they did not set to work to gain their ends, for according to their nature they used the most practical means within their reach, and used them eagerly too. According to the mind of the flesh the only way to obtain a thing is to fight for it, and James sets this down as the reason of all fighting. "Whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" This is the form of effort of which we read, "*Ye fight and war, yet ye have not.*"

To this mode of operation men cling from age to age. If a man is to get along in this world they tell me he must contend with his neighbors, and push them from their vantage ground, he must not be particular how *they* are to thrive, but he must mind the main chance on his own account, and take care to rise, no matter how many he may tread upon. He cannot expect to get on if he loves his neighbor as himself. It is a fair fight, and every man must look to himself.

Do you think I am satirical? I may be, but I have heard this sort of talk from men who meant it. So they take to fighting, and that fighting is often victorious, for according to the text, "*ye kill*"—that is to say, they so fight that they overthrow their adversary, and there is an end of him. They are men of great strength, young lions that can go forth and tear their prey, and yet it is said of them that they "lack and suffer hunger," while they that wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing. These lusters are unrestrained in their efforts to gain their point, they stick at nothing, they kill, and desire to have.

Moreover, they fight with great perseverance, for the text says, "*Ye fight and war.*" Now, war is a continuation of the act of fighting, prolonging it from campaign to campaign, and conducting it by the rules of military art till the victory is won. Multitudes of men are living for themselves, competing here and warring there, fighting for their own hand with the utmost perseverance. They have little choice as to how they will do it. Conscience is not allowed to interfere in their transactions, but the old advice rings in their ears, "Get money, get money honestly if you can, but by any means get money." No matter though body and soul be ruined, and others be deluged with misery, fight on, for there is no discharge in

this war. If you are to win you must fight, and everything is fair in war. So they muster their forces, they struggle with their fellows, they make the battle of life hotter and hotter, they banish love, and brand tenderness as folly, and yet with all their schemes they obtain not the end of life in any true sense. Well says James, "Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not."

When men who are greatly set upon their selfish purposes do not succeed they may possibly hear that the reason of their non-success is "*Because ye ask not.*" Is, then, success to be achieved by asking? So the text seems to hint, and so the righteous find it. Why does not this man of intense desires take to asking? The reason is, first, because it is unnatural to the natural man to pray, as well expect him to fly.

He despises the idea of supplication. "Pray?" says he. "No, I want to be at work. I cannot waste time on devotions, prayers are not practical, I want to fight my way. While you are praying I shall have beaten my opponent. I go to my counting house, and leave you to your Bibles and your prayers." He has no mind for asking of God. He declares that none but canting hypocrites care to pray, thus confessing that if he were to pray, he would be a canting hypocrite.

As for him, his praying is of quite another sort, and woe to those who come into his clutches, they will find that with him business is business, and pretty sharp business too. He will never stoop to pray, He is too proud. God's reliance he does not understand, self-reliance is his word. Self is his god, and to his god he looks for success. He is so proud that he reckons himself to be his own providence, his own right hand and his active arm shall get to him the victory.

When he is very liberal in his views he admits that though he does not pray, yet there may be some good in it, for it quiets people's minds, and makes them more comfortable, but as to any answer ever coming from prayer, he scouts the idea, and talks both philosophically and theologically about the absurdity of supposing that God alters His course of conduct out of respect to the prayers of men and women. "Ridiculous," says he, "utterly ridiculous," and therefore, in his own great wisdom he returns to his fighting and his warring, for by such means he hopes to attain his end. Yet he obtains not. The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to obtain their objective.

For a while the carnal man goes on fighting and warring, but by and by he changes his mind, for he is ill, or frightened. His purpose is the same, but if it cannot be achieved one way he will try another. If he must ask, well, he will ask, he will become religious, and do good to himself in that way. He finds that some religious people prosper in the world, and that even sincere Christians are by no means fools in business, and therefore, he will try their plan.

And now he comes under the third censure of our text, "*Ye ask and receive not.*" What is the reason why the man who is the slave of his lusts obtains not his desire, even when he takes to asking? The reason is because his asking is a mere matter of form, his heart is not in his worship. He buys a book containing what are called forms of prayer, and he repeats these, for repeating is easier than praying, and demands no thought.

I have no objection to your using a form of prayer if you pray with it, but I know a great many who do not pray with it, but only repeat the form. Imagine what would come to our families if instead of our children speaking to us frankly when they have any need they were always to think it requisite to go into the library and hunt up a form of prayer, and read it to us. Surely there would be an end to all home-feeling and love, life would move in fetters. Our household would become a kind of boarding-school, or barracks, and all would be parade and formality, instead of happy eyes looking up with loving trust into fond eyes that delight to respond.

Many spiritual men use a form, but carnal men are pretty sure to do so, for they end in the form. This man's prayer is asking amiss, because it is entirely for himself. He wants to prosper that he may enjoy himself, he wants to be great simply that he may be admired, his prayer begins and ends with self.

Look at the indecency of such a prayer even if it be sincere. When a man so prays he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires, nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous,

but a large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds.

No, if a man will live to himself and his lusts, let him do so, and the further he gets off from God the more consistent he will be. Let him not mouth the Lord's prayer as though God were his father, or drag in Christ's sacred name to sanctify his greed, or invoke the Spirit's blessed power in connection with his personal aggrandizement, or his selfish ambition. If he does so, he will be no better off than he was at the beginning, he will ask, and have not. His asking will miss because he asks amiss, that he may consume it upon his lusts.

If your desires are the longings of fallen nature, if your desires begin and end with your own self, and if the chief end for which you live is not to glorify God, but to glorify yourself, then you may fight, but you shall not have, you may rise up early and sit up late, but nothing worth gaining shall come of it. Remember how the Lord has spoken in the thirty-seventh Psalm, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

So much upon the poverty of lusting.

II. Secondly, I have now before me a serious business, and that is, to show HOW CHRISTIAN CHURCHES MAY SUFFER SPIRITUAL POVERTY, so that they too "desire to have, and cannot obtain."

Of course the Christian seeks higher things than the worldling, else were he not worthy of that name at all. At least professedly his objective is to obtain the true riches, and to glorify God in spirit and in truth. Yes, but look, dear brethren, all churches do not get what they desire. We have to complain, not here and there, but in many places, of churches that are nearly asleep, and are gradually declining. Of course they find excuses. The population is dwindling, or another place of worship is attracting the people. There is always an excuse handy when a man wants one, but still there stands the fact—public worship is almost deserted in some places, the ministry has no rallying power about it, and those who put in an appearance are discontented or indifferent.

In such churches there are no conversions. If they had half-a-dozen added to them in a year, they would need to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus," but as to bringing thousands to Christ, they secretly fear that this would be an undesirable thing, for it might involve excitement, and they are so proper that they dread anything of that sort. To do nothing, and let men be damned, is in their judgment proper and respectable, but to be alive and energetic is a perilous state of affairs, for it might lead to fanaticism and indecorum.

They are especially afraid of anything like "sensationalism." That ugly-looking word they set before us very much as the Chinese try to frighten their enemies by painting horrible faces on their shields. Never mind that terrible word, it will hurt no one. These churches "have not," for no truth is made prevalent through their zeal, no sin is smitten, no holiness promoted, nothing is done by which God is glorified. And what is the reason of it?

First, *even among professed Christians, there may be the pursuit of desirable things in a wrong method.* "Ye fight and war, yet ye have not." Have not churches thought to prosper by competing with other churches? At such and such a place of worship they have a very clever man, we must get a clever man too, in fact, he must be a little cleverer than our neighbor's hero. That is the thing—a clever man! Ah me, that we should live in an age in which we talk about clever men in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Alas, that this holy service should be thought to depend upon human cleverness!

Churches have competed with each other in architecture, in music, in apparel, and in social status. The leaders fancy that to succeed they must have something more handsome, artistic, or expensive than their neighbors, hence they build Gothic edifices in which the minister's voice gets up among the timbers, and is never properly heard, or else they purchase an organ with every stop except the full one. The opinion would seem to be widely spread that there is a deal of grace in an organ. To pray to God

with a windmill like the Tartars would be very absurd, but to praise God with wind passing through a set of pipes is eminently proper. I never have seen the distinction, and do not see it now. Organ or no organ is not now the question, but I speak of instances in which these machines are set up as a matter of rivalry. Is it not the design of many to succeed by a finer building, better music, and a cleverer ministry than others? Is it not as much a matter of competition as a shop front and a dressed window are with drapers? Is this the way by which the Kingdom of God is to grow up among us?

In some cases there is a measure of bitterness in the rivalry. It is not pleasant to little minds to see other churches prospering more than their own. They may be more earnest than we are, and be doing God's work better, but we are too apt to turn a jealous eye towards them, and we would rather they did not get on quite so well. Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The spirit that dwells in us lusteth to envy?" If we could see a disturbance among them, so that they would break up and be ecclesiastically killed, we would not rejoice. Of course not, but neither should we suffer any deadly sorrow. In some churches an evil spirit lingers. I bring no railing accusation, and therefore, say no more than this, God will never bless such means and such a spirit, those who give way to them will desire to have, but never obtain.

Meanwhile, what is the reason why they do not have a blessing? The text says, "*Because ye ask not.*" I am afraid there are churches which do not ask. Prayer in all forms is too much neglected. Private prayer is allowed to decay. I shall put it to the conscience of every man how far secret prayer is attended to, and how much of fellowship with God there is in secret among the members of our churches. Certainly its healthy existence is vital to church prosperity.

Of family prayer it is easier to judge, for we can see it. I fear that in these days many have quite given up family prayer. I pray you do not imitate them. I wish you were all of the same mind as the Scotch laborer who obtained a situation in the house of a wealthy farmer who was known to pay well, and all his friends envied him that he had gone to live in such a service. In a short time he returned to his native village, and when they asked him why he had left his situation, he replied that he "could not live in a house which had no roof to it." A house without prayer is a house without a roof. We cannot expect blessings on your churches if we have none on your families.

As to the congregational prayer, the gathering together in what we call our prayer meetings, is there not a falling off? In many cases the prayer meeting is despised, and looked down upon as a sort of second-rate gathering. There are members of churches who are never present, and it does not prick their consciences that they stay away. Some congregations mix up the prayer meeting with a lecture, so as to hold only one service in the week.

I read the other day an excuse for all this, it is said that people are better at home, attending to family concerns. This is idle talk, for who among us wishes people to neglect their domestic concerns? It will be found that those attend to their own concerns best who are diligent to get everything in order, so that they may go out to assemblies for worship. Negligence of the house of God is often an index of negligence of their own houses. They are not bringing their children to Christ, I am persuaded, or they would bring them up to the services. Anyway, the prayers of the church measure its prosperity. If we restrain prayer we restrain the blessing. Our true success as churches can only be had by asking it of the Lord. Are we not prepared to reform and amend in this matter? Oh for Zion's travelling hour to come, when an agony of prayer shall move the whole body of the faithful.

But some reply, "There are prayer meetings, and we do ask for the blessing, and yet it comes not." Is not the explanation to be found in the other part of the text, "*Ye have not, because ye ask amiss*"? When prayer meetings become a mere form, when brethren stand up and waste the time away with their long orations, instead of speaking to God in earnest and burning words, when there is no expectation of a blessing, when the prayer is cold and chill, then nothing will come of it. He who prays without fervency does not pray at all. We cannot commune with God, who is a consuming fire, if there is no fire in our prayers. Many prayers fail of their errand because there is no faith in them. Prayers which are filled with doubt are requests for refusal.

Imagine that you wrote to a friend and said, "Dear friend, I am in great trouble, and I therefore tell you, and ask for your help because it seems right to do so. But though I thus write, I have no belief that you will send me any help, indeed, I should be mightily surprised if you did, and should speak of it as a great wonder." Will you get the help, think you? I should say your friend would be sensible enough to observe the little confidence which you have in him, and he would reply that, as you did not expect anything, he would not astonish you. Your opinion of his generosity is so low that he does not feel called upon to put himself out of the way on your account. When prayers are of that kind you cannot wonder if we "have not, because we ask amiss."

Moreover, if our praying, however earnest and believing it may be, is a mere asking that our church may prosper because we want to glory in its prosperity, if we want to see our own denomination largely increased, and its respectability improved, that we may share the honors thereof, then our desires are nothing but lustings after all. Can it be that the children of God manifest the same emulations, jealousies, and ambitious as men of the world? Shall religious work be a matter of rivalry and contest? Ah, then, the prayers which seek success will have no acceptance at the mercy seat. God will not hear us, but bid us be gone, for He cares not for the petitions of which self is the object. "Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss."

III. Thirdly, I have a much more pleasing work to do, and that is to hint at THE WEALTH WHICH AWAITS THE USE OF THE RIGHT MEANS, namely, of asking rightly of God.

I invite your most solemn attention to this matter, for it is vitally important. And my first observation is this, *how very small after all is this demand which God makes of us.* Ask! Why, it is the least thing He can possibly expect of us, and it is no more than we ordinarily require of those who need help from us. We expect a poor man to ask, and if he does not we lay the blame of his lack upon himself. If God will give for the asking, and we remain poor, who is to blame? Is not the blame most grievous? Does it not look as if we were out of order with God, so that we will not even condescend to ask a favor of Him? Surely, there must be in our hearts a lurking enmity to Him, or else instead of its being an unwelcome necessity it would be regarded as a great delight.

However, brethren, whether we like it or not, remember, *asking is the rule of the kingdom.* "Ask, and ye shall receive." It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody's case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule for Him. Remember this text, JEHOVAH says to His own Son, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?

What reason can be pleaded why we should be exempted from prayer? What argument can there be why we should be deprived of the privilege and delivered from the necessity of supplication? I can see none, can you? God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul, and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray. Pray he did without ceasing, his epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it. If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it.

Moreover, it is clear to even the shallowest thinker that *there are some things necessary for the church of God which we cannot get otherwise than by prayer.* You can get that clever man I spoke about—the less, perhaps, you pray about him the better, and that new church, and the new organ, and the choir, you can also get without prayer, but you cannot get the heavenly anointing, the gift of God is not to be purchased with money.

Some of the members of a church in a primitive village in America thought that they would raise a congregation by hanging up a very handsome chandelier in the meeting house. People talked about this chandelier, and some went to see it, but the light of it soon grew dim. You can buy all sorts of

ecclesiastical furniture, you can purchase any kind of paint, brass, muslin, blue scarlet, and fine linen, together with flutes, harps, sackbuts, psalteries, and all kinds of music—you can get these without prayer, in fact, it would be an impertinence to pray about such rubbish, but you cannot get the Holy Ghost without prayer. “He bloweth where He listeth.” He will not be brought near by any process or method at our command apart from asking. There are no mechanical means which will make up for His absence.

If the Holy Spirit be not there, what is the use of that clever man of yours? Will anybody be converted? Will any soul be comforted? Will any children of God be renewed in spiritual life without the Holy Spirit? Neither can you get communion with God without prayer. He that will not pray cannot have communion with God. Yet more, there is no real spiritual communion of the church with its own members when prayer is suspended. Prayer must be in action, or else those blessings which are vitally essential to the success of the church can never come to it. Prayer is the great door of spiritual blessing, and if you close it you shut out the favor.

Beloved brethren, do you not think that *this asking which God requires is a very great privilege?* Suppose there were an edict published that you must not pray, that would be a hardship indeed. If prayer rather interrupted than increased the stream of blessing, it would be a sad calamity.

Did you ever see a dumb man under a strong excitement, or suffering great pain, and therefore anxious to speak? It is a terrible sight to see, the face is distorted, the body is fearfully agitated, the mute writhes and labors in dire distress. Every limb is contorted with a desire to help the tongue, but it cannot break its bonds. Hollow sounds come from the breast, and stuttering of ineffectual speech awaken attention, though they cannot reach so far as expression. The poor creature is in pain unspeakable. Suppose we were in our spiritual nature full of strong desires, and yet dumb as to the tongue of prayer, I think it would be one of the direst afflictions that could possibly befall us, we should be terribly maimed and dismembered, and our agony would be overwhelming. Blessed be His name, the Lord ordains a way of utterance, and bids our heart speak out to Him.

Beloved, we must pray, it seems to me that *it ought to be the first thing* we ever think of doing when in need. If men were right with God, and loved Him truly, they would pray as naturally as they breathe. I hope some of us are right with God, and do not need to be driven to prayer, for it has become an instinct of our nature.

I was told by a friend yesterday the story of a little German boy, a story which his pastor loved to tell. The dear little child believed his God, and delighted in prayer. His schoolmaster had urged the scholars to be at school in time, and this child always tried to be so, but his father and mother were dilatory people, and one morning, through their fault alone, he just left the door as the clock struck the hour for the school to open. A friend standing near heard the little one cry, “Dear God, do grant I may be in time for school.” It struck the listener that for once prayer could not be heard, for the child had quite a little walk before him, and the hour was already come. He was curious to see the result.

Now it so happened this morning that the master, in trying to open the schoolhouse door, turned the key the wrong way, and could not stir the bolt, and they had to send for a smith to open the door. Hence a delay, and just as the door opened our little friend entered with the rest, all in good time. God has many ways of granting right desires. It was most natural that instead of crying and whining a child that really loved God should speak to Him about his trouble. Should it not be natural to you and to me, spontaneously and at once to tell the Lord our sorrows and ask for help? Should not this be the first resort?

Alas, according to Scripture and observation, and I grieve to add, according to experience, *prayer is often the last thing*. Look at the sick man in the one hundred and seventh Psalm. Friends bring him various foods, but his soul abhorreth all manner of meat, the physicians do what they can to heal him, but he grows worse and worse, and draws nigh to the gates of death, “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” That was put last which should have been first. “Send for the doctor. Prepare him

nourishment. Wrap him in flannels!" All very well, but when will you pray to God? God will be called upon when the case grows desperate.

Look at the mariners described in the same psalm. The barque is well-nigh wrecked. "They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble." Still they do all they can to ride out the storm, but when "they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end: then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." Oh, yes, God is sought unto when we are driven into a corner and ready to perish. And what a mercy it is that He hears such laggard prayers, and delivers the suppliants out of their troubles. But ought it to be so with you and with me, and with churches of Christ? Ought not the first impulse of a declining church to be, "Let us pray day and night until the Lord appears for us, let us meet together with one accord in one place, and never separate until the blessing descends upon us"?

Do you know, brothers, *what great things are to be had for the asking?* Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven lies before the grasp of the asking man, all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer. Jesus says, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father," and Paul says, "All things are yours, and you are Christ's." Who would not pray when all things are thus handed over to us? Ay, and promises that were first made to special individuals, are all made to us if we know how to plead them in prayer.

Israel went through the Red Sea ages ago, and yet we read in the sixty-sixth Psalm, "There did we rejoice in him." Only Jacob was present at Peniel, and yet Hosea says, "There he spake with us." Paul wants to give us a great promise for times of need, and he quotes from the Old Testament, "For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Where did Paul get that? That is the assurance which the Lord gave to Joshua, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Surely the promise was for Joshua only. No, it is for us. "No Scripture is of private interpretation," all Scripture is ours.

See how God appears unto Solomon at night, and he says, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon asks for wisdom. "Oh, that is Solomon," say you. Listen. "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God." God gave Solomon wealth, and fame into the bargain. Is not that peculiar to Solomon? No, for it is said of true wisdom, "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor," and is not this much like our Savior's words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"?

Thus you see the Lord's promises have many fulfillments, and they are waiting now to pour their treasures into the lap of prayer. Does not this lift prayer up to a high level, when God is willing to repeat the biographies of His saints in us, when He is waiting to be gracious, and to load us with His benefits?

I will mention another truth which ought to make us pray, and that is, that *if we ask, God will give to us much more than we ask.* Abraham asked of God that Ishmael might live before Him. He thought "Surely this is the promised seed: I cannot expect that Sarah will bear a child in her old age. God has promised me a seed, and surely it must be this child of Hagar. Oh that Ishmael might live before thee." God granted him that, but He gave him Isaac as well, and all the blessings of the covenant.

There is Jacob, he kneels down to pray, and asks the Lord to give him bread to eat and raiment to put on. But what did his God give him? When he came back to Bethel he had two bands, thousands of sheep and camels, and much wealth. God had heard him and done exceeding abundantly above what he asked.

It is said of David, "The king asked life of thee, and thou gave him length of days," yea, gave him not only length of days himself, but a throne for his sons throughout all generations, till David went in and sat before the Lord, overpowered with the Lord's goodness.

"Well," say you, "but is that true of New Testament prayers?" Yes, it is so with the New Testament pleaders, whether saints or sinners. They brought a man to Christ sick of the palsy, and asked Him to heal him, and He said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." He had not asked that, had he? No, but God gives greater things than we ask for. Hear that poor, dying thief's humble prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus replies, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." He had not dreamed of such an honor.

Even the story of the Prodigal teaches us this. He resolved to say, “I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” What is the answer? “This my son was dead, and is alive again: bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hands, and shoes on his feet.”

Once get into the position of an asker, and you shall have what you never asked for, and never thought to receive. The text is often misquoted, “God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we *can* ask, or even think.” We *could* ask, if we were but more sensible and had more faith, for the very greatest things, but God is willing to give us infinitely more than we ask.

At this moment I believe that God’s church might have inconceivable blessings if she were but ready now to pray. Did you ever notice that wonderful picture in the eighth chapter of Revelation? It is worthy of careful notice. I shall not attempt to explain it in its connection, but merely point to the picture as it hangs on the wall by itself.

Read on—“When he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.” Silence in heaven, there were no anthems, no hallelujahs, not an angel stirred a wing. Silence in heaven! Can you imagine it? And look! You see seven angels standing before God, and to them are given seven trumpets. There they wait, trumpet in hand, but there is no sound. Not a single note of cheer or warning during an interval which was sufficiently long to provoke lively emotion, but short enough to prevent impatience. Silence unbroken, profound, awful reigned in heaven.

Action is suspended in heaven, the center of all activity. “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer.” There he stands, but no offering is presented, everything has come to a standstill. What can possibly set it in motion? “And there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” Prayer is presented together with the merit of the Lord Jesus.

Now, see what will happen. “And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hands.” That is the key of the whole matter. Now you will see, the angel begins to work, he takes the censer, fills it with the altar fire, and flings it down upon the earth, “and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquake.” “And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.” Everything is moving now. As soon as the prayers of the saints were mixed with the incense of Christ’s eternal merit, and begun to smoke up from the altar, then prayer became effectual. Down fell the living coals among the sons of men, while the angels of the divine providence, who stood still before, sound their thunder blasts, and the will of the Lord is done.

Such is the scene in heaven in a certain measure even to this day. Bring hither the incense. Bring hither the prayers of the saints! Set them on fire with Christ’s merits, and on the golden altar let them smoke before the Most High, then shall we see the Lord at work, and His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. God send His blessing with these words, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 10:38-42, 11:1-13

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—100, 958, 977

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